

: Erotica



a woman's touch

he only way is up for budding erotic filmmaker Anna Brownfield.

at <Donna Molan>





Mostly it lurks in the shadows, but every once in a while the porn industry stumbles into the spotlight giving us a rare insight into the illicit intrigues of this underworld trade. Irrational, emotional outbursts proclaiming pornography the primary social ill hit the headlines and we either stash our porn collection away or wave it around – triumphantly fanning ourselves with it on overheated peak hour traffic trams... or perhaps that's just me. Anyway, on meeting Anna Brownfield, I breathe a heavy sigh of relief: Thank god, I have found a provocative saving grace in what could turn out to be Australia's first feminist erotic filmmaker.

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→ "We are living in the most conservative times since the 50s," complains Brownfield, who is struggling to make legitimate porn films in which women are in control and sex is something we should not feel ashamed about. I like this girl immediately. Brownfield is a 33-year-old filmmaker. She completed her honours degree in media arts at RMIT and has been making short films for 13 years, since teaching herself with her father's Super 8 camera. Her films have always explored themes of sexuality and in particular how female sexuality is perceived from a very early age.

→ In 2002 she wrapped up three years of production on her debut feature *The Money Shot* which cost a grand total of \$4000. Self-funded – thanks to maxing out the credit card – *The Money Shot* saw Brownfield playing out her real life fantasy on the big screen. The idea for the film came about after she received a couple of offers to direct and produce adult erotica films. The first approach came from a strippers' agent in Queensland who had never made a film before and basically wanted a woman to front the venture. He wanted Brownfield to start out making a film a month with

a view to stepping the rate up to two.

"I figured he was going to produce the same crap as everyone else," she recalls.

"And he also wanted to run a sideline business where you could screw your favourite porn star for a huge price!!!"

→ The second entrepreneur she spoke to owns several brothels in Melbourne.

He was looking into the possibility of involving 'girls' on the production side, but wasn't interested in deviating from the age-old, mainstream, male-focused format. "His comment to me was, 'Well you could make normal porn first, so you can get money to make your arty porn'."

→ Thus came the inspiration for a script about a girl who has just graduated from film school and, finding no other outlet for her talents, decides to make a porn film.

→ The feature was shot on a domestic range three-chip Sony mini DV. A crew of nine people and a cast of 24 agreed to deferred payment and, after careful preproduction planning and rehearsals, the film was shot in 18 days. Stussy clothing came through with some of the wardrobe, as did Mossimo. Fetish outlet Lucrezia and De Sade provided the "oh so tight" leather pants worn by Garry



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the porn star, while Siren Doll came up with all the lingerie, Max Factor stumped up the make-up and Glyde chipped in with all the condoms and lube. Such generous wardrobe and prop donations allowed Brownfield to blow over half the budget on catering – great food being the acknowledged key to a successful shoot, especially when no one is getting paid.

→ So why did the film take three years to complete? As it often does, postproduction turned into a very drawn-out affair. Editing took two years on and off as both Anna and fellow editor Lance Petrie were working in other jobs to pay the bills. One major problem they faced was the actual edit system. The version of Adobe Premier 5.1C they were using could only edit 20-minute chunks before it would go out of sync. The film was shot on 16:9 and had to be compressed for output to VHS – a process which required many all-nighters. As well as the lack of hardware space, sound also proved to be a drama because they had no real control over the mixing. On top of all this Brownfield's relationship with co-director and partner Petrie ended up breaking

down, leaving her in sole control of the final stages of the film's production.

→ So why choose sex as a medium? Brownfield is particularly articulate about her reasons, as one would hope.

"Women are not taught to be sexual beings," she says. "You use your sexuality as a woman, but then schools of feminist thought can be quite reactionary, denying that sexuality." As Brownfield defines herself first and foremost as an erotic feminist filmmaker she seriously questions these opposing views.

→ She found porno films pretty boring and was frustrated by the fact that they rarely showed women as being sexually diverse. On the contrary, women were generally portrayed as being very passive and Brownfield believes that a lot of heterosexual pornography can be quite violent because of this.

→ Brownfield's brand of pornography intends to portray women as sexually dominant and very in control of who they are and what they are doing. "Part of using sex as a medium is that it is a form of therapy," she confesses. But mostly it seems that Brownfield is boldly

determined to mix it with the men.

Women are not associated with making pornography and she is happy to rise to the challenge of breaking the mould.

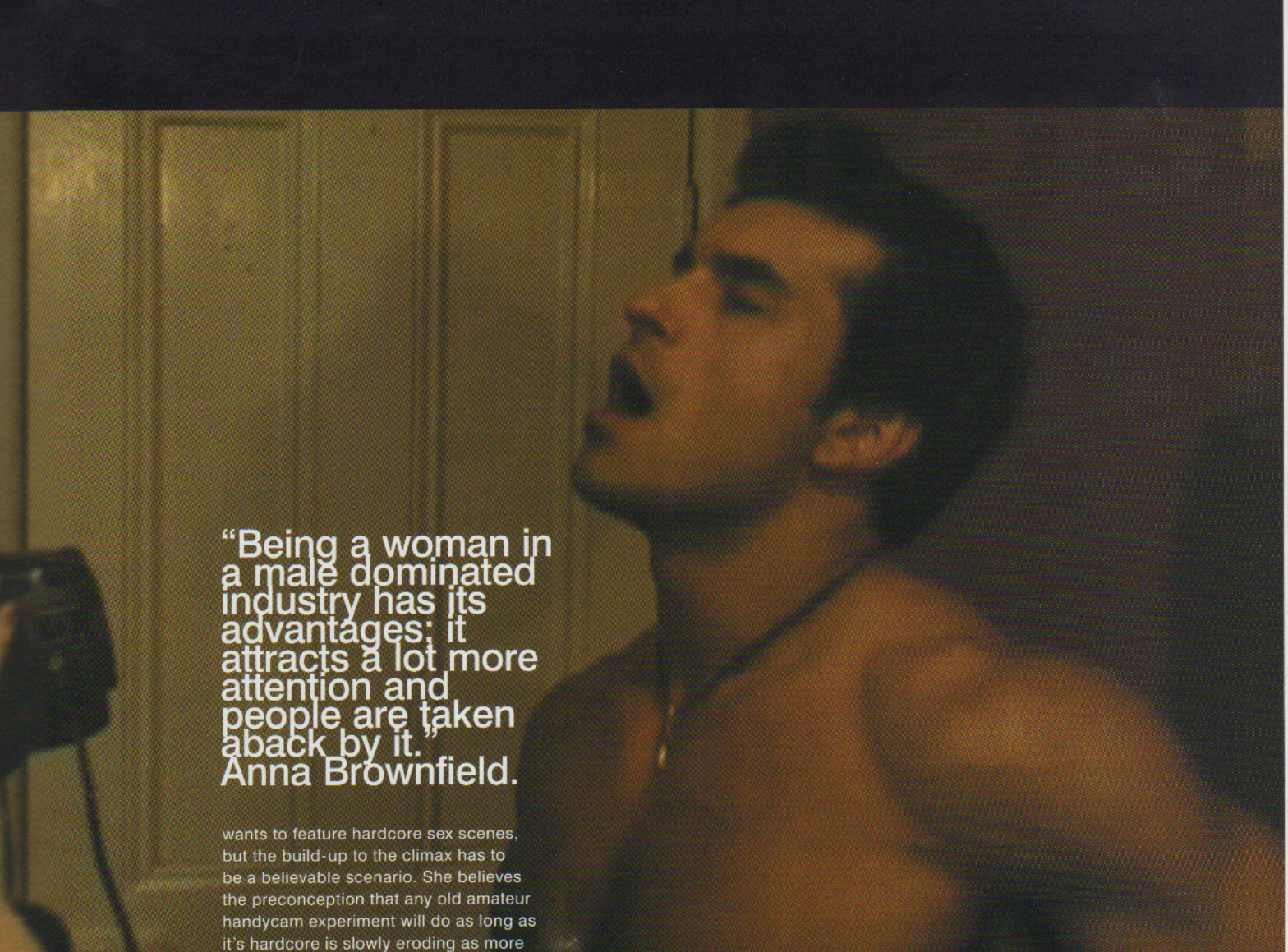
→ And indeed it will be a challenge. Due to rigid censorship laws the Australian porno trade is little more than a 'cottage industry'. "In Queensland you will find a lot of amateur couple videos being made," she says. The sunshine state is apparently also home to a group of women who have set up a website aimed at the female market. Brownfield believes that the growing conservatism in the Senate and the rise of the likes of Family First, are going to impose even greater restrictions on the availability of X-rated films. It is already illegal to make X-rated videos anywhere outside of the ACT. Shooting an X-rated film in Victoria could earn Brownfield a \$100,000 fine, a two-year jail sentence and seizure of all her assets.

→ What makes a video X-rated? The penis rising past 45 degrees, shots of inner labia (even if they just hang out naturally), genital moisture and insertion of any sort whether it be vaginally, anally or orally. You cannot show any type of fetishisation in an X-rated film, although you can in an R-rated movie, providing you don't show actual penetration. X-rated videos are now classed as non-violent erotica and due to this restriction you can't show coercion or any violent acts, even if they are not in an actual sex scene or occur off screen. One film was refused classification here in Australia because it depicted a man holding a club and hitting someone over the head even though you did not see it happen.

→ Senator Harradine is to blame for the fetish ban. It came as a trade-off against the sale of the second part of Telstra. In Victoria it is currently illegal to sell X-rated videos, although it is legal to buy them. What makes the industry so notoriously frustrating are the contradictions within it.

→ A little daunted by such barriers Brownfield went straight to the person she admired most, American porn star Candida Royalle, who has been a major figure in the adult film industry for almost 25 years. Royalle's advice down the phone was to keep pursuing her goal. She recognised that Brownfield had a strong idea and aesthetic, but before she would consider teaming up, she wanted to see how Brownfield handled hardcore sex scenes.

→ So what comes first: the sex or the film? "The film of course," asserts Brownfield. "Just because it is pornography does not mean it has to be bad filmmaking." She wants to see more seduction in porno films. She



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Anna Brownfield.**

wants to feature hardcore sex scenes, but the build-up to the climax has to be a believable scenario. She believes the preconception that any old amateur handycam experiment will do as long as it's hardcore is slowly eroding as more and more women become interested in porn. She says, "In our age of visual stimulation the image of porn as dirty is changing."

→ Brownfield hopes to make films for the real lesbian market, not to be confused with the Barbie doll *Penthouse/Playboy* representation of what a lesbian is. She intends to aim other films at a female and couple demographic using real women with real breasts. "After all," she says. "What's the point of sex with a woman if her tits aren't bouncing around?" She wants to keep working with a predominantly female crew and giving her camerawoman creative freedom; although she admits that she does have extreme aesthetic ideas in terms of the way the finished film going to look.

→ Now that *The Money Shot* is in the can, Brownfield has a great showreel piece and a means of getting her name out there. She is trying to get distribution for the film, but sees this as one of the hardest hurdles to jump in filmmaking. She knows that when it comes to making porn films, government bodies are unlikely to come to the party, so private investors will probably be the way to go, although they won't be able access the tax scheme that makes the offer of investing in arthouse films much more attractive. Ideally Brownfield would prefer to seek partnerships with more women and adult industry shops aimed at the female demographic, but she presumes that, in the end, the money will come from men.

She believes that distributing the films herself will be the only way to make a decent return on them, but then she will have to pay for them to be classified, which is an expensive exercise.

"Ultimately the money is to be made overseas on cable or even the hotel video service," she says. "You can cover your costs in Australia, but if you want to make a profit, you have to go overseas."

→ Brownfield is currently working on an R-rated project based on a collection of erotica set along the Murray River in the 1950s. It is a bit gentler than what she usually likes, but there is some great characterisation and diverse sex scenes. Her other film is based on the shenanigans of band members and it's based on her own experience of working as a door bitch for a rock club in Melbourne. There's also a dominatrix film in the works.

→ Her advice to anyone wanting to work in the industry is to go in with a plan otherwise it can be a bit overwhelming and take over your life. She believes in trusting your instincts. "Most people are not above board," she warns. "You need to be strong enough to say no."

→ Brownfield has found that the women involved in the industry are amazing and extremely supportive, but most of the men she would not touch with a stick, although she does rave on about David Haines, ex-Chief Censor-turned-porn-director, who is known as the 'intellectual gentleman of the industry'. "Being a woman in a male dominated industry has its advantages," she affirms. "It attracts a lot more attention and people are taken aback by it." Despite the inevitable moralistic judgments of her career choice Brownfield holds strongly to her beliefs and vision: "I believe people should not be ashamed that there are many facets to one's sexuality that should be explored. There is no right or wrong. There are only choices in sexuality. Everyone has the right to choose and there will always be some that approve and some that oppose." ●

Anna Brownfield will be speaking at AGIdeas 2005.